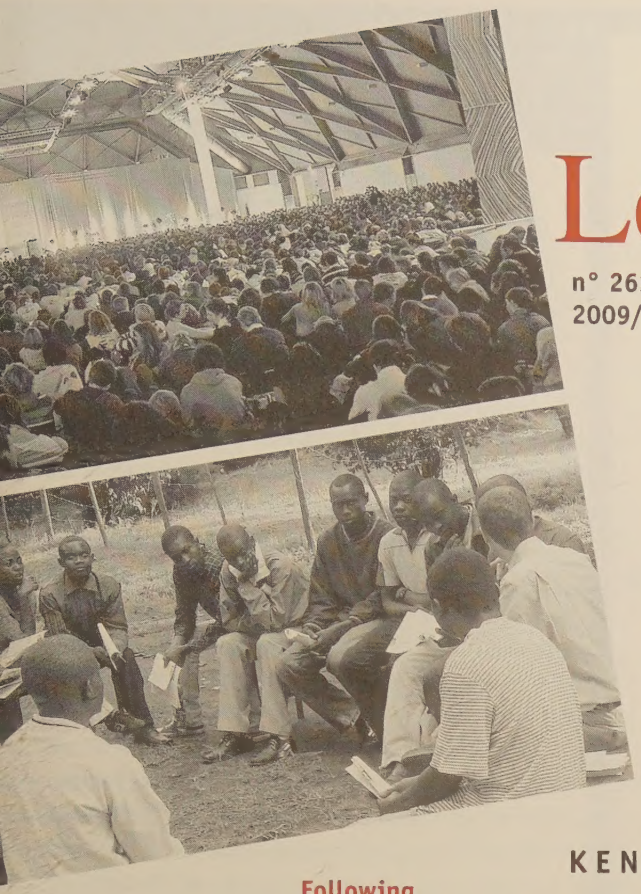

Letter from Taizé

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A Hope Rekindled

Following the meetings in Nairobi and Brussels, here is the *Letter from Kenya*, written by Brother Alois and distributed at the meeting held in the Belgian capital.

Since Brussels is the headquarters of many European institutions, it was important to send a message to the European Union in the name of the younger generations. The text is found at the end of the *Letter from Kenya*. Brother Alois went personally to deliver it on December 15 to José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission.

In the course of this year, we will be reflecting on the different parts of this *Letter from Kenya* through contributions made by young people from different continents. In this issue, we focus on some ideas found in the introduction.

KENYA

In the face of the divisions that are tearing the (African) continent apart, many people continue to strive courageously for reconciliation and pacification.

Peter, 23 years old, runs a rehabilitation center for street children in a large outlying district of Nairobi called Korogocho. After having read the introduction to the Letter from Kenya, *he writes:*

"To help create more fraternal relationships." One way of creating them is by people meeting from time to time, taking time to share and time to listen to each other. Every time when people are together, they become better able to know and to understand each other. Recently we had a meeting here in Nairobi organized by the Taizé brothers. We were able to meet other people from different parts of Kenya and Africa. I was able to know how other people live at their places, to understand more about their cultures. What I came to learn was that we can continue living like brothers and sisters only by respecting other peoples' cultures. This can help us to bring contact between people and their history.

"In the face of the divisions that are tearing the continent apart." There are lot of difficulties and challenges which are tearing our continent apart. Through all that the ones most affected and the ones who are being used to tear it apart are young people. You find that they are being used to do evil things like killing each other and they are not doing that because they like to but because they want to get something to sustain their lives. We experienced this during the election violence: some young people were used to tear this country apart. Jesus Christ wants us to live in a good way with love of God. That is why we as Christians are called to preach love, peace and unity among people. People know that the baptism of Christ is stronger to unite us and no one is called to divide people. God wants us to live together with his love.

Africa is a place where crucifixion and resurrection find their deepest meaning, and where building trust and reconciliation is an ongoing daily reality (Desmond Tutu).

Sister Isabelle is one of the sisters of Saint Andrew who spent several months in Nairobi alongside the brothers to prepare for the meeting. She writes:

The miracle is that this meeting could take place in a country where, exactly a year ago, neighbors were killing each other, from one street to another, from one house to another, using stones and machetes. The explosion of violence that had seized Kenya following the elections undermined any attempt to bring people together.

It was daring and even a touch of gospel madness to consider a meeting in this context. But there was the certainty that it was good to be there, to be with them, precisely in these difficult times when trust in others and in oneself was shaken.

We came first as pilgrims, unaware of what tomorrow would bring, depending on our hosts for everything. Day by day, confidence gained ground. Despite the fears and misgivings, despite the serious

Continued on last page

LISTENING TO THE WORD

You are mine!

> But now listen, Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. This is what the Lord says—he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams. Some will say, "I belong to the Lord"; others will call themselves by the name of Jacob; still others will write on their hand, "The Lord's," and will take the name Israel. (Isaiah 44:1-5)

The idea of belonging to someone else could seem at first only negative. Does it not seem to contradict our just and understandable aspirations to freedom and autonomy? It looked that way to the people to whom the prophet speaks—a people in exile, under the rule of others, a people that no longer belonged to itself.

At the same time, it does not seem that the Gospel invites us to free ourselves from all forms of belonging. It calls us rather to choose the master we wish to serve. If we think about it, we realize that our daily life is made up of many realities to which we belong. Some of them we willingly recognize. Others seem desirable, but the doors remain closed to us or else they only open after a time of waiting or after we have proven ourselves.

God does not act in this way. He chose us "from our mother's womb," from the very beginning, before we even had the time or opportunity to do or to deserve anything. God says an unconditional yes to the people he calls "his servant," whom he "redeemed" from harsh slavery and who now belongs to him. He also says this yes to each one of us; it becomes the source of a life that satisfies our thirst for recognition and love, that can spring up even in the midst of our deserts and that will never run dry.

When we become aware of God's yes, we become witnesses to this belonging and we sing its praises just as the witnesses in this text do; we become able to make our own the joyful song that Brother Roger proposes to our soul: "I belong to Christ, I am Christ's."

What different kinds of belonging is my daily life made up of? Which of them have I chosen? Which ones distinguish or separate me from others; which ones make me realize that I am linked to others?

Do I believe that God has chosen me? When do I feel that I am borne forward by the "yes" he says to me? How can I witness to this before others?

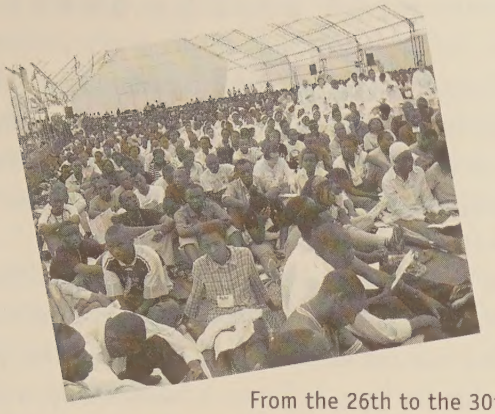
A PORTRAIT

A prophet who comforts (Isaiah 40–55)

How can we describe someone who remains co pletely anonymous? Chapters 40 to 55 of the Bo of Isaiah constitute a short collection of prophe texts that make up a clear literary unit, whose a thor has effaced himself behind his message. know neither his name nor the place from whi he speaks. All we know is that his message co cerns the events which took place around 538 ye before Jesus Christ, when Cyrus, king of the P sians, allowed the Jews exiled in Babylon to retu to their homeland. The name "Second Isaiah" w given to the author of this collection because thinking is inspired by a tradition that goes ba to the great eighth-century prophet Isaiah.

This Second Isaiah has to announce an abs lutely unthinkable event: a tiny group of people "remnant" that may have numbered no more th 15,000, was going to cross the desert in a kind new Exodus (43:16-21) and come back to Jeru lem. It is hardly surprising that those who hea him remained unconvinced. A deported nati was often doomed to disappear, and the seve years of exile must have caused deep discoura ment: people assumed that the covenant wh God had wished to make with his people was b ken, that God had had enough of them.

By what arguments could this discourageme be overcome? If God is eternal, his wisdom m



From the 26th to the 30th of November 2008, 7000 young people from different regions of Kenya as well as from other African countries and other continents met together in Nairobi. It was the second international meeting organized in Africa by the Taizé Community, after one in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1995. This stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" was hosted by more than eighty parishes of the different Churches of Nairobi. Its aim was to help create more fraternal relationships, and to move beyond the mistaken views of others perpetuated by the lack of contact between peoples and by the wounds of history.

The Taizé Community has been present for 55 years on the African continent by small groups of brothers sharing the lives of the very poor. Over the years, brothers have lived in Algeria, Ivory Coast, Niger, Rwanda and Kenya. For sixteen years now, some brothers have been living in Senegal, in a predominantly Muslim district of Dakar.

Desmond Tutu, the Anglican archbishop emeritus of Cape Town (South Africa), writes: "Africa is a place where crucifixion and resurrection find their deepest meaning, and where building trust and reconciliation is an ongoing daily reality... We are all children of God and in Christ there is no Rwandese or Congolese, there is no Burundian or Kenyan, no Nigerian or South African: we are all one in Christ Jesus. I know that this is the message that the Taizé Community also proclaims and that they are in solidarity with us as we press this message home in South Africa, across the whole continent of Africa and in the rest of the world where 'fear of the stranger' still needs to be turned into friendship and reconciliation and trust."

In Africa, trials do not take away that sense of dignity which is so often evident among the very poor. The difficulties of life do not banish joy; a serious outlook does not exclude dancing. Many are those who refuse to give in to despair. Women are often in the forefront; with inventiveness and perseverance they take on a great many tasks in family and society.

In the face of the divisions that are tearing the continent apart, many people continue to strive courageously for reconciliation and pacification. Christians are called to hold on firmly to this hope: the bond of baptism in Christ is stronger than divisions. There are African Christians who have paid for that conviction of faith with their lives

This "Letter from Kenya," written by Brother Alois for the year 2009, was made public during the young adult European meeting that brought together 40,000 young adults in Brussels at the end of December 2008.

LETTER 2009

Letter from Kenya

All over the world, society and the ways people behave are changing rapidly. While unprecedented possibilities of development are multiplying, instability is growing too and worries about the future are becoming more pronounced.[1]

For technical and economic progress to go hand in hand with greater humanity, it is indispensable to search for a deeper meaning to existence. In the face of the weariness and helplessness that many people feel, the question arises: what is the source from which we draw life?

Already centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah indicated a source when he wrote: "Those who hope in the Lord renew their strength; they run and are not exhausted; they walk and do not grow weary."[2]

Many more people than in the past are unable to find this source. Even the name of God is fraught with misunderstandings or else is completely forgotten. Could there be a link between the disappearance of faith and the loss of a zest for life?

How can we clear away whatever it is that obstructs the source? Surely by being attentive to the presence of God. There we can draw hope and joy.

[1] In many countries, despite the growth of the world economy and hopes for development, slums are becoming larger instead of smaller and unemployment is devastating for many people, particularly the young. In Africa, rapid technical progress threatens to stifle the sense of gradual maturation so fruitful in traditional life. Moreover, solidarity among members of families and ethnic groups is growing weaker. How can this value be brought to life again and be extended beyond the limits of families and ethnic groups? That would help to limit the departure of so many young people attracted by countries with a higher standard of living without always being able to weigh the consequences of such a decision.

[2] Isaiah 40:31. When these words were spoken, weariness was already a reality. "I said: I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all" (Isaiah 49:4). And again: "Even youths grow tired and weary; young men stumble and fall" (Isaiah 40:30). But the prophet reawakens hope: "The Lord is the everlasting God. He gives strength to the weary" (Isaiah 40:28-29).

Then the source begins to flow once more and our life becomes meaningful. We become able to take responsibility for our life—to receive it as a gift and to give it in our turn for those entrusted to us.

Even if we have very little faith, a reversal takes place whereby we no longer live centered on ourselves. By opening the gates of our own heart to God, we prepare the way for God to come for many others as well.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR LIFE

Yes, God is present in every person, whether they are believers or not. From its very first page, the Bible describes in a beautiful and poetic way the gift that God makes of his breath of life to every human being.[3]

By his life on earth, Jesus revealed God's infinite love for each person. In giving himself to the very end, he allowed God's yes to pervade the depths of our human condition.[4] Ever since the resurrection of Christ, we can no longer despair of the world or of ourselves.

From that time on, God's breath, the Holy Spirit, has been given to us for ever.[5] By his Spirit who dwells in our hearts, God says yes to what we are. We never tire of hearing these words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord will take pleasure in you, and your land will be married."[6]

So let us consent to what we are or what we are not; let us even take responsibility for all we have not chosen but which makes us who we are.[7] Let us dare to be creative even with what is not perfect. And we will find freedom. Even when overburdened, we will receive our life as a gift and each day as God's today.[8]

[3] It is true that many obstacles risk stifling life: injustice in all its forms, violence around us and in us, the spirit of competition, our mistakes, fear of—or becoming closed to—what is different, lack of self-esteem....

[4] In vast regions of Africa, for example among the Masai Christians, Christ is seen as the elder brother. That corresponds to the expression of the early Christians: Christ is "the eldest of many brothers and sisters" (Romans 8:29). By his death and resurrection, Jesus goes beyond family and ethnic solidarities (see Colossians 1:18-20).

[5] In the biblical languages, "breath" and "spirit" are the same word. The prophets announced that, through the Holy Spirit, God would dwell within human beings himself (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Through the coming of Christ, by his death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit is given "without measure" (John 3:34). From then on God's Breath has been constantly at work within humanity, so that one day it may form a single Body in Christ.

[6] Isaiah 62:1-4.

[7] Taking responsibility for present realities does not mean accepting everything or submitting passively to events. We may be led to resist an unjust situation or to denounce it.

[8] One of Brother Roger's earliest books bore the title *Living in God's Today* (1958). Brother Roger was convinced of the importance of believers being fully present to contemporary society rather than taking refuge in nostalgia for the past or fleeing towards an illusory future. It is only in the present moment that we can encounter God and root our lives in him.

LED BEYOND OURSELVES

If God is in us, he also goes ahead of us.[9] He takes us as we are, but he also draws us beyond ourselves. At times he comes to unsettle our life, overturning our plans and our projects.[10] Jesus' life helps us to enter into this way of looking at things.

Jesus let the Holy Spirit lead him onward. He never stopped referring to the invisible presence of God his Father. That was the basis of his freedom, which led him to give his life for love. In Jesus, a relationship with God and freedom were not mutually exclusive but rather reinforced one another.[11]

In all of us there is the desire for an absolute; we aspire to it with our whole being—body, soul and mind. A thirst for love burns in each person, from infants to the elderly. Even the greatest human intimacy cannot completely satisfy it.

We often experience these aspirations as a lack or as emptiness. They can sometimes cause us to lose focus. But far from being an anomaly, they are part of our being. They are a gift; already they contain within them God's call to open ourselves.

So each person is invited to ask themselves: what steps forward am I asked to take now? It is not necessarily a matter of "doing more". What we are called to is to love more. And since love requires our entire being to express itself, it is up to us to find ways of being attentive to our neighbor, and to do so without waiting a moment longer.

WHAT LITTLE WE CAN DO, WE MUST DO

HELPING ONE ANOTHER TO DEEPEN OUR FAITH

Too many young people feel alone on their inner journey. Two or three persons can already assist one another, sharing and praying together, even with those who affirm that they are closer to doubt than to faith.[12]

This type of sharing is greatly reinforced when it is

[9] An African Christian, Saint Augustine, wrote this prayer in the fourth century: "You were more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest" (*Confessions*, Book III, 6, 11).

[10] "My ways are not your ways", says the Lord (Isaiah 55:8). The Virgin Mary also consented to looking beyond present events, even the incomprehensible death of her son, while still believing that God was faithful to his promise of life.

[11] During the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2008, Cardinal Danneels, the archbishop of Malines-Brussels, declared, "The force of the Word implies the freedom of the hearer's response. This is precisely the power proper to the Word of God. It does not eliminate the freedom of the hearer, but is the foundation of it."

[12] Jesus said, "When two or three meet together in my name, I am in their midst" (Matthew 18:20).

ntegrated into the local Church.[13] It is the community of ommunities, where all the generations gather and where eople do not choose one another. The Church is God's amily, that communion which draws us out of isolation. here we are welcomed; there God's yes to our existence becomes a reality; there we find God's indispensable consolation.[14]

If parishes and youth groups were first of all places of heartfelt kindness and of trust, places of hospitality where we are attentive to the weakest!

GOING BEYOND THE COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF OUR SOCIETIES

If we are to take part in building a more united human family, is not one of the urgent tasks to look at the world "from below"[15]? That way of looking entails a great simplicity of life.

Communication is becoming easier and easier and yet at the same time societies remain highly compartmentalized. The risk of mutual indifference continues to grow. Let us move beyond all that keeps us apart! Let us go towards those who suffer! Let us visit those who are neglected and mistreated! Let us think of the immigrants, so close to us and yet often so far away![16] Where suffering intensifies, practical projects which are that many signs of hope are frequently seen to be on the increase.

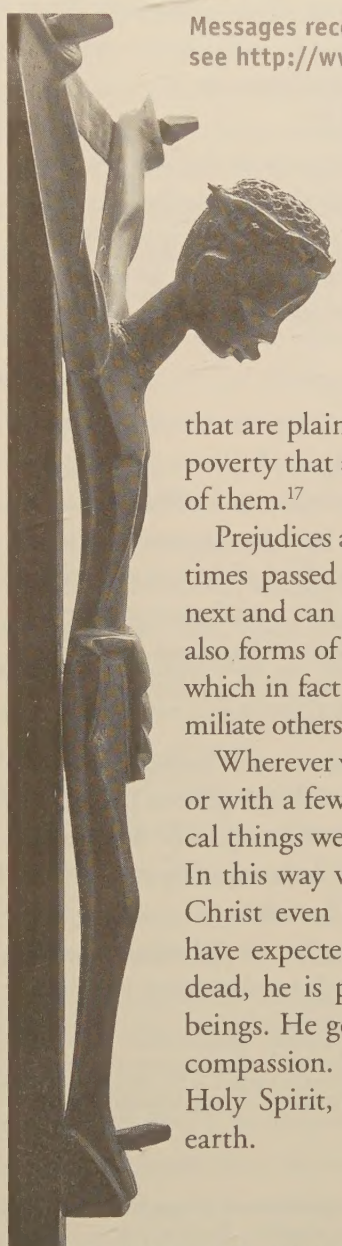
To struggle against injustice and the threat of conflicts, and to encourage a sharing of material goods, it is essential to acquire skills. Persevering in one's studies or in professional training can also be a service rendered to others.

If there are scandalous forms of poverty and injustice that are plain to see, there are other kinds of poverty that are less visible. Loneliness is one of them.[17]

Prejudices and misunderstandings are sometimes passed on from one generation to the next and can lead to acts of violence. There are also forms of violence that seem harmless, but which in fact do great damage and which humiliate others. Mockery is one of these.[18]

Wherever we are, and whether we are alone or with a few others, let us search for practical things we can do in situations of distress. In this way we will discover the presence of Christ even in places where we would not have expected to find him. Risen from the dead, he is present in the midst of human beings. He goes before us along the roads of compassion. And already now, through the Holy Spirit, he is renewing the face of the earth.

f. Alois



[13] The first Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). In Africa, as in Latin America and in some Asian countries, Christians meet not only in parishes but also by district, by village, in small church communities. They pray together and offer each other mutual support. There is human warmth and a personal commitment by each individual that helps make the Church an authentic place of communion.

[14] In Africa, the Church is often seen as God's family and God as a mother who comforts. Already the prophet Isaiah had written: "God says: As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). See also Isaiah 49:13-15. Looking at the Church in this way compels us to strive for its unity. We cannot resign ourselves passively to God's family remaining split into a host of different denominations.

[15] The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer belonged to a rather privileged social class but, during the Second World War, his involvement in the resistance cast him into a precarious situation, and then led him to prison and to death. In 1943 he wrote: "An experience of incomparable value remains, that we have learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the excluded, those under suspicion, the mistreated, the powerless, the oppressed and despised, in short, of those who suffer."

[16] Although efforts are fortunately being made today to keep alive cultures threatened with extinction, it is true that no culture develops in a vacuum. In the age of globalization, the mixing of cultures is not only inevitable; it is an advantage for our societies.

[17] A Kenyan proverb reminds us of this: "There is no man who cannot become an orphan."

[18] In the *Rule of Taizé* (1954), Brother Roger wrote, "Mockery, that poison of a common life, is treacherous because under its cover are flung the so-called truths one dares not say face to face. It is cowardly, because it ruins the character of a brother before the others."

Upcoming stages of the pilgrimage of trust on earth in 2009

Brother Alois will go with other brothers...
...to Lithuania: Vilnius, May 1-3
then to Latvia (Riga, May 4)
and Estonia (Tallinn, May 5)
...to Spain: Seville, May 8-10
...to Germany: Stuttgart, October 10
...to Hungary: Pécs, October 23-25

International meetings
The next young adult European meeting will take place from December 29, 2009 to January 2, 2010 in Poznan, Poland.

A young adult international meeting will be held for the fifth time in Asia February 3-7, 2010 in Manila, Philippines.

Messages received for the Brussels meeting: see http://www.taize.fr

For an open Europe, a land of solidarity

The search for peace and reconciliation in the human family is part and parcel of the vocation of the Taizé Community. For thirty years now the community has been animating a "pilgrimage of trust on earth" which has brought together several generations of young adults from every continent.

Together in Brussels for a stage in this pilgrimage, from December 29, 2008 to January 2, 2009, 40,000 young adults from throughout Europe would like to rekindle the intuition and the enthusiasm that marked the beginnings of the building of Europe: to make reconciliation among peoples a reality by setting in common their resources and their specific gifts.

THE UNPRECEDENTED ADVENTURE OF BUILDING A UNITED EUROPE

Europe has succeeded in initiating a period of peace without precedent in its history. The road already travelled has awakened tremendous hope in other regions of the world. After so much conflict between Europeans, peace is a priceless gift. And yet it is never attained once and for all; each generation still has to build it.

DO NOT GIVE IN TO APATHY

European institutions are sometimes viewed today with incomprehension and a certain degree of apathy. And yet they are indispensible to ensure continuity in building peace on the continent. They must not, however, be a substitute for taking on responsibility at every level of European society.[1] For their part, national leaders can contribute to a new outlook by refusing unfairly to designate European institutions as scapegoats when the time comes for hard decisions.

SOLIDARITY ON A WORLDWIDE SCALE

Building a united Europe acquires its full meaning only if it shows itself to be in solidarity with the poorest peoples on the earth. These peoples are evolving so quickly! The current situation requires a new effort of understanding to adapt European institutions and aid mechanisms.

Many young people are asking for the globalization of the economy to go hand in hand with a globalization of solidarity. Does not the goal of shared prosperity call upon the rich countries to show greater generosity, both by investments in favour of developing countries and by a considerate and responsible welcome offered to the immigrants coming from those countries?

By forming a great many personal relationships across their own continent, many young people have already acquired a European awareness. That does not mean abandoning the specific characteristics of each people or region, but rather undertaking a sharing of gifts while respecting diversity. Initiatives such as a European volunteer service will deepen mutual understanding between peoples and regions.

THE CURRENT FINANCIAL CRISIS

The current financial crisis makes it clear that, if the economy disregards ethical norms, it cannot develop in a lasting way. This crisis can become an opportunity if it leads us to question our priorities in building up world society: what kind of development are we interested in? What kind of development is possible that respects the limited resources of our planet?

The more complex the economic and financial system becomes, the more it has to be coordinated and regulated to promote the common good of the entire human family. Supranational bodies that set ground rules ensuring greater justice are henceforth indispensible.[2]

TWO CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHRISTIANS

The Gospel encourages simplicity of life. It calls believers to bring their own desires under control in order to succeed in setting limits, not by constraint but by choice.[3] Freely chosen simplicity enables those who are privileged to resist the race to acquire what is superfluous and contributes to the struggle against the poverty imposed on those who are deprived.

Promoting steps toward forgiveness is another contribution of Christians. Such steps imply the refusal to pass on to the next generation rancour for still festering wounds—not to forget a painful past but to heal the memory by forgiveness, interrupting the chain reaction that causes resentment to endure. Without forgiveness, there is no future for societies. The powerful impetus that lies at the origin of the building of Europe arose to a great extent from this conviction.[4]

Everyone can take part in a civilization marked not by mistrust but by trust. At times, in the course of history, just a few people were enough to tip the scales towards peace.[5]

[1] In order to go forward in deepening a sense of community, the principle of subsidiarity is essential. It allows the agencies of the Community to intervene in certain areas when the member-states are unable to do so, while at the same time respecting the proper jurisdictions of these states. Decisions should be taken at the level closest to the citizens of Europe. This principle encourages each one to assume their own responsibilities and should keep nations from making excessive demands.

[2] In 1963, in his encyclical *Pacem in terris*, Pope John XXIII had proposed the creation of a "public authority of universal competence." That prophetic intuition is more relevant now than ever.

[3] Jesus said, "What good is it for a person to gain the whole world if he loses or ruins himself?" (Luke 9:25)

[4] That conviction was a stimulus for the coming together of France and Germany. It also lay at the origin of the mutual forgiveness between the Polish and German peoples at the initiative of the Polish bishops in 1965. Christians thus paved the way for political reconciliation.

[5] The founders of the European Union were only a few, but they had a brilliant intuition: to prevent another conflict by beginning to hold resources in common (coal and steel) which were used in the past to resupply the war machine.

have resources beyond anything we can imag-
and his strength must be literally inexhaust-
(40:27-31). And the prophet came up with
more powerful images: can a mother forget
child she has borne (49:14-15), or a man reject
woman who was the great love of his youth
6-7)?
he first words of this collection are repeated in-
ntly: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your
." (40:1). After a time of extreme desolation,
people needs to be "comforted," which means
e enabled to cease their lamenting, to stand
traight and acquire new courage. Though this
ple may well be at the end of their rope, this
fort must show that a future for them flows
n the heart of God.
he image of God that believers had acquired has
n purified through the extreme trial of the exile,
an also be seen by reading the Book of Job. When
ond Isaiah speaks of God, there are no outbursts
nger, no threats, no authoritarian affirmations.
d loves, and does so for no other reason than be-
se of his love (43:4,25). It could be said that from
v on, all God can do is love (54:7-10). If he brings
people back to their land and to their city, that
oration will have consequences for all the nations
:22; 52:10), for God is a universal God (51:4). In
utterly free choice of one nation, in the forgive-
s shown by the return from exile (in some sense
n more undeserved), God goes beyond his own
venant with this people. The king of the Persians
n thus receive the title of "Anointed", Messiah
5:1), and the authentic ministry of mediation be-
een God and human beings will be entrusted to a
mble Servant.
That Servant will reflect the characteristics of his
od. Not only will he not impose himself (42:1-5),
t he himself will be vulnerable to the others' dis-
uragement (49:4-6). He will not reply with harsh
ords to those who mock him (50:5-6). Continuing
listen to God like the humblest of believers (50:4),
will go to the point of taking upon himself all the
nbelief around him (53:12), following the example
f the God who has "borne" his people throughout
eir entire history (46:3-4).

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Do we have the right to be happy when others are suffering?

God's breath in us is profound joy. When we are happy, we are in harmony with God. But when others suffer, our happiness is not in harmony with their suffering. That is why the apostle Paul writes, yes, "rejoice with those who are joyful" but also "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Joy is certainly what we are made for. But when confronted with the suffering of others, it is by weeping that we are in the truth.

Happiness can wound those who are excluded from it. The satisfaction of someone who has succeeded hurts those who have failed. The rejoicing of lovers is hard to take for those who have been deserted. When, in addition, those who are happy let me feel their malicious pleasure in having taken my place, their happiness becomes downright unbearable. Someone's happiness can hurt us even if they do not do so intentionally: Jesus in a parable speaks of the happiness of a rich man "joyously living in splendor" without even noticing the poor man Lazarus at his gate (Luke 16: 19-21).

It is better to weep than to have such happiness. But how can Paul write, "Always be joyful" (Philippians 4:5)? If there are forms of happiness that wound others, there are also forms of sadness that hurt. When I am sad and depressed, I do not want my friends to burden me with their own sadness, adding their gloom to my misfortune. What should we do, then, when others suffer? Remain joyful, and run the risk of wounding with our happiness those who are left out? Or be sad, and run the risk of adding to their unhappiness, which is already hard enough to bear?

"Always be joyful." Paul continues, "Let your affability be known to all" (Philippians 4:5). The joy he is speaking about radiates kindness and gentleness. It is first and foremost an inward joy. Sometimes it is almost imperceptible and no outward sign gives it away. It has a delicate touch. Just as, in the cold of winter, it feels good to stay close to a radiant source of heat, it is good, in misfortune, to be close to someone whose deep-seated joy radiates kindness.

What is the secret of a happiness that does not offend but lifts up those who are suffering? It lies in being a poor man's joy, a happiness not possessed but shared from the outset.

Refusing to be happy when others are suffering could lead to mutual despair. We have better to do for those who are undergoing misfortune. One of the most precious things we can offer is our hidden struggle to keep alive the joy of the Holy Spirit, the joy that radiates kindness and communicates strength and courage.

material difficulties, the young people and families in the city and the surrounding villages wanted to make the dream a reality.

Welcoming the guest passing through, opening your door to the unknown, running the risk of meeting others, of sharing, reveals what lies in the depths of our hearts: a desire to be recognized and to discover in the other a common humanity, a desire for peace stronger, deeper than the movements of hatred and violence that tear people apart and divide them.

The very simple act, accessible to anyone, of opening their homes to strangers, was in this context a witness to the Gospel and lent to the prayers of the meeting an extraordinary energy. Quite unusual Taizé prayers, as a matter of fact! From the first day the young people entered the big tent, sitting on the ground on their *kangas* (cloths). Several thousand African faces interspersed here and there with a few white ones. And then, animated by the music, they stood up, began to dance, to jump, to lift their arms, singing at the top of their voices at a feverish rhythm. The brothers, meanwhile, cleared a path to get to their places in the middle of the crowd: a small boat tossed by the waves. This sometimes lasted twenty minutes! The first time I wondered how it would end... and then the choir slowed down the rhythm, and the crowd followed. We heard "Now you can sit" and immediately "Bless the Lord my soul..." Everyone entered into an attitude of recollection. The silence after the reading was impressive in its density.

From the beginning to the end of the preparation for this meeting we were aware of bearing a treasure in a jar of clay—the clay of our limitations and our weaknesses. Sometimes the clay jar seemed so cracked that we almost lost hope of making it to the end... That is how we know that the meeting did not "succeed" by our own strength but because it showed the treasure of faith and generosity that is alive in the heart of young Kenyans.

In Africa, trials do not take away that sense of dignity which is so often evident among the very poor. The difficulties of life do not banish joy; a serious outlook does not exclude dancing.

Moses, a young man from Nakuru, in Kenya, writes:

"Trials do not take away that sense of dignity which is so often evident among the very poor." The Africans who attended the pilgrimage were from all walks of life, the majority being low-earning classes. What really impressed me was no one could distinguish them from the rich; their cooperation and involvement in all sections of the meeting was great, hence giving that sense of dignity. Moreover, "the difficulties of life in Africa do not banish joy," for sure. Everyone was overjoyed, both the visitors and the host families; in spite of their social status, they had at heart to aid, share and participate in all activities.

I made this observation when I visited the neighboring parishes. There was a spirit of joy in everyone I met, worked and shared a word with. I remember when all were in the large tent where prayers were celebrated (I had never seen that before), everyone had this urge that I can't express to sing and dance for the Lord, hence empowering the act of joy.

"In Africa, many are those who refuse to give in to despair." For instance most of the host families earn very little, especially those in the interior rural areas, and they gave the very best they could afford in hospitality and contributions towards the success of the pilgrimage. Many projects and inventions are spearheaded and carried out by women. They dedicate their lives to supporting the less fortunate and the minorities in society. They persevere a lot due to discrimination against their rights and in the long run they toil and moil and God is always by their side so they come out being victors.

BRUSSELS

A million Bibles printed in China

At the European meeting in Brussels Brother Alois announced that, to respond to the needs of the Christians of China, the community would print one million Bibles in China—200,000 complete Bibles and 800,000 New Testaments with Psalms.

This is not the first time, in circumstances of special need, that Taizé supports the dissemination of the Bible. During the Second Vatican Council, the Latin American bishops asked Brother Roger to send to Latin America one million New Testaments in Spanish and 500,000 in Portuguese. In 1989, Taizé printed one million New Testaments in Russian for the Russian Orthodox Church.

The printing of this edition, according to the Franciscan translation "Studium Biblicum," will take place in Nanjing. From there, the books will be delivered across the country in successive stages throughout the year 2009.

During the same time, the Taizé Community will also support the biblical work of the Protestant Church in China.

The printing costs are supported by a fund organized by Taizé called Operation Hope. To contribute: IRELAND & UK: Cheques, payable to "Operation Hope", to be sent to: Nick and Jane Shields, 42 Blenheim Road, St Johns Wakefield WF1 3JZ, UK. jane@laloge.co.uk

ASIA, AUSTRALIA, CANADA, NEW ZEALAND, etc.: Gifts can be sent in the same way as subscriptions to the Letter from Taizé, making sure to indicate with your payment "for Operation Hope".

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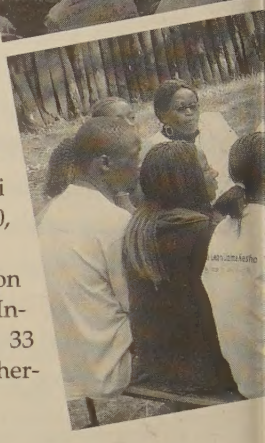

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